

**Lifetime Television's
Stop Violence Against Women Breakfast**

April 4, 2006 – 9:45 AM

Thank you all so much for giving me the opportunity to help kick-off your Stop Violence Against Women Week in Washington ... Lifetime Television, the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence and the National Alliance to End Sexual Violence have been at the forefront of efforts to help recognize, stop, prevent and educate others about violence against women ... I am pleased to be in the company of such hard working and dedicated people.

Since the Violence Against Women Act was first enacted in 1994, notable gains have been made in not only combating domestic violence, sexual assault and dating violence, but also in expanding vital programs made available to the victims of these horrible acts. Outreach curriculum, events and informational materials have been made available in countless neighborhoods across our nation that would otherwise not have had the resources to offer such valuable services. However, despite encouraging results, there were some gaps in previous forms of the VAWA.

The VAWA reauthorization that was just signed into law by President Bush -- and which I was proud to have co-sponsored in the Senate --places a renewed emphasis on improving the response of law enforcement agencies in underserved communities, while also increasing funding for local organizations that are poised to respond to the needs of affected women.

For women throughout my home state of Alaska, this focus is especially important. Recent data shows that from 1999-2004, there were more than 18,000 domestic violence related charges in a state with just over 600,000 people – that is roughly one domestic violence charge per 33 residents in just five years. And according to information from the Uniform Crime Reports, Alaska has ranked in the top 5 states for the highest rate of rape each year since 1976 – and ranked #1 nearly every year. Alaska’s forcible rape rate is 2.5 times larger than the national average ... and it’s even higher for Alaska Native women. Clearly, we have a cause for concern and a need to take action.

Outside of a few major cities, half of Alaska's population is thinly spread throughout a geographic area nearly 1/3 the size of the continental US – making access to legal, medical and social services very difficult. And because of cultural differences, coupled with jurisdictional limitations, many Alaskan Natives are unable to access services available to other communities. VAWA of 2005 helps address some of this critical challenges.

Notably, this legislation:

*** Strengthens the training and education of health care providers and funds federal programs to improve services to victims. By giving our health care professionals the tools and resources to better assess and properly treat women who have been victims of abuse or an assault, we are helping our medically underserved areas improve their response to violence against women. In Alaska, this funding may help compensate for travel costs. Women who need exams after a sexual assault or rape must travel to hub cities to get proper treatment. It will also help defray the costs law enforcement faces to properly handling such cases.**

*** It also provides far reaching guidelines and resources in order to better assist tribal communities in their efforts to decrease the incidents of violent crimes against Indian women. Sadly, it is estimated that 1 in 3 Native women will be raped and that 6 in 10 will be physically assaulted during their lifetime. To help combat these startling statistics, VAWA of 2005 increases support for essential tribal services for women. By understanding the unique factors that lead to the unusually large number of Native women who experience violence, we'll be able to better formulate programs and outreach to those women in need of assistance.**

The strengthened Violence Against Women Act of 2005 has built upon the successes of previous legislation, while looking ahead to meet the emerging needs of women in communities – large and small – throughout our country. The passage of this VAWA is a true testament to the work of so many dedicated people – many of them sitting in the room this morning – who have come together under one uniting goal -- to stop violence against women. I can assure you that your work has not gone unnoticed.

I thank you again for giving me this opportunity to speak with you this morning. I look forward to our continued work together to help raise national awareness, and secure legislative action, to a once taboo topic -- ending violence against women.

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